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ABSTRACT

Although few people bring their psychological problems to mental health professionals, research in the area of 'natural' help is rudimentary. To investigate the process and effectiveness of natural professional groups in helping individuals experiencing marital disruption, 42 helpers (14 mental health professionals, 14 divorce lawyers, and 14 leaders of self-help groups) participated in a 40-minute interaction with a woman trained to portray a separated woman considering divorce. Audiotapes of the interactions were coded for helper behaviors according to the Counselor Verbal Response Category System. An analysis of the results showed that mental health professionals used more Minimal Encouragers, Open Questions, and Reflections than both other groups, and more Restatements, Interpretations, and Confrontations than lawyers. Self-help leaders used more Self-Disclosures than both other groups, more Information than professionals, and more Open Questions, Reflections, Interpretations, and Confrontation than lawyers. Lawyers used more Verbosity and Information than both other groups and more Closed Questions than self-help leaders. Lawyers were more effective with legal/financial problems and less effective with personal/emotional problems than both other groups. While the findings can be useful for helpers in various groups to improve their effectiveness, further research on the effects of different behaviors is needed. (Author/BL)

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Natural and Professional Help During Marital Disruption

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Abstract

The study compared the process and effectiveness of three natural and professional groups who commonly provide help to persons experiencing marital disruption: mental health professionals, divorce lawyers, and leaders of self-help groups. In simulated helping interactions, mental health professionals showed more Minimal Encouragers, Open Questions, and Reflections than both other groups and more Restatements, Interpretations, and Confrontations than lawyers. Self-help leaders showed more Self-Disclosures than both other groups, more Information than professionals, and more Open Questions, Reflections, Interpretations, and Confrontations than lawyers. Lawyers showed more Verbosity and Information than both other groups and more Closed Questions than self-help leaders. Lawyers were more effective with legal/financial problems (as assessed by three different data sources) and less effective with personal/emotional problems (as assessed by one of three data sources) than both other groups.

Natural and Professional Help

During Marital Disruption

Though it has now become well documented that the majority of "psychological" problems people experience are never brought to mental health professionals or trained paraprofessionals (cf. Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960), research in the area of "natural" help is still rudimentary. Recent surveys of natural helpers (e.g., Cowen, McKim, & Weissberg, 1981; Doane & Cowen, 1981), though informative, offer only one, potentially biased perspective on the process and effectiveness of natural helping. Though some well-controlled work has been done comparing the process and effectiveness of paraprofessional vs. professional help (cf. Durlak, 1979), there has been little similar work comparing natural to professional help. The present study investigated the process and effectiveness of natural help by comparing the helping sessions of three different natural and professional groups who commonly provide help to persons experiencing the important critical life event of marital disruption (cf. Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978).

Subjects for the study were 42 helpers from three groups: 14 mental health professionals experienced with marital disruption (8 male, 6 female), 14 divorce lawyers (7 male, 7 female), and 14 leaders of self-help groups for separated and divorced persons (6 male, 8 female). Each helper saw, in a 40-minute helping interaction, one of three female "helpees" trained to consistently portray the role of a separated woman considering divorce. All helpees had themselves experienced marital disruption and were unaware of the study's hypotheses. Audiotapes from the helping interactions were transcribed, unitized, and coded for helper behaviors using Hill's Counselor Verbal Response Category System (HCVRCS), which has demonstrated reliability and validity (Hill, 1978; Hill, Charles, & Reed, 1981; Hill, Thames, & Rardin, 1979).

The eight undergraduates who transcribed tapes and the two others who unitized and coded them were unaware of group membership and the study's hypotheses. Average inter-rater reliability for the unitization process, across seven randomly selected transcripts, was .88 (using the most conservative, "exact-agreement" method of calculation; Repp, Deitz, Boles, Deitz, & Repp, 1976) and for the coding process, across seven other randomly selected transcripts, .77 (using the kappa coefficient which controls for chance agreement; Spitzer, Cohen, Fliess, & Endicott, 1967; Tinsley & Weiss, 1975). Effectiveness ratings were obtained from three sources--helpers, helpees, and transcribers--using a measure developed for this study which assesses the helper's effectiveness with personal/emotional as well as legal/financial problems.

The independent variable of the study was helping group and there were 20 dependent variables: six effectiveness ratings (one focusing on personal/emotional and a second on legal/financial problems, each rated by helpers, helpees, and transcribers), 13 helper behavior category variables derived using the HCVRCS (each expressed as a proportion of total helper response units), and a measure of helper verbosity (i.e., total number of response units). The arcsine transformation was applied to the 13 HCVRCS proportion variables to improve normality and homogeneity of variances across groups. There were no significant helper sex effects on any of the study's dependent variables.

Twenty one-way ANOVAs were done, one for each dependent variable, and 14 of these indicated significant ($p < .05$) group differences (see Table 1). Inspection of post-hoc Duncan Multiple Range Tests for the significant ANOVAs indicated that professionals showed greater proportions of Minimal Encouragers, Open Questions, and Reflections, as compared to both other groups, and greater proportions of Restatements, Interpretations,

and Confrontations, as compared to lawyers only. Self-help leaders showed greater proportions of Self-Disclosures compared to both other groups, greater proportions of Information compared to professionals, and greater proportions of Open Questions, Reflections, Interpretations, and Confrontations compared to lawyers. Lawyers showed greater Verbosity as well as greater proportions of Information, compared to both other groups, and greater proportions of Closed Questions compared to self-help leaders. From each of the three perspectives, lawyers were seen as significantly more effective than the other two groups in handling the legal/financial problems of the helpee. Professionals and self-help leaders were seen as more effective than lawyers in the personal/emotional realm, but significantly so only from the helpee's perspective.

Repeated measures ANOVAs were done across three 13⅓-minute session "phases" for Verbosity and the 13 HCVRCS category variables to determine how helper behavior changed over the course of the session and if such changes depended on helper group membership (see Table 2). Inspection of post-hoc Duncan Multiple Range Tests for significant phase main effects and group X phase interaction effects indicated that Minimal Encouragers, Open and Closed Questions all diminished from the first to the second and from the second to the third session phases. Inspection of post-hoc tests for the group X phase interaction for Closed Questions indicated that the overall phase effect was strongest for lawyers. Restatements also diminished across session phases, but significantly so only from the first to the third phase. Information increased from the first to second and second to third phases. Inspection of post-hoc tests for the group X phase interaction for Information indicated that the overall phase effect held only for the professionals and lawyers; the self-help leaders showed no significant change in Information across phases.

Finally, Direct Guidance occurred more often in the final session phase and Confrontations more often in the middle phase.

There are several ways in which the study's findings could be used in the community. They could be shared with helpers in various types of groups simply to inform them about what they're doing and how it compares to what other helpers are doing. Such information might give them new ideas about how they can help. Consultative efforts could be provided to helpers in the community to help them make changes in directions they desire. Such efforts, perhaps, best represent the ultimate purpose of community psychology research on natural helping: i.e., to help tap the valuable natural helping resources in the community and, hopefully, improve their utilization and effectiveness. Consultation could have especially far-reaching impact with divorce lawyers since this helper group is involved at some point with nearly every marital disruption case and since divorce lawyers may have considerable difficulty handling their clients' frequent personal/emotional problems (see Doane & Cowen, 1981). Information on different helping approaches could also be integrated into existing formal helper-training programs (e.g., law students who decide to concentrate in family law could take special courses). Any consultative efforts, however, should be evaluated, both in terms of their immediate effects on the helpers and their ultimate effects on helpees. Furthermore, consultants and evaluators should keep in mind that changes helpers make in their behavior, if the changes make the helpers less "natural," could have harmful as well as helpful effects.

The similarity of helping approaches between the professionals and self-help leaders has some interesting implications. In particular, the study's findings could help improve professional attitudes about

the quality of natural helping and thereby encourage professionals to have greater contact with natural helpers. Such contact could have benefits for both natural and professional helpers. Both groups could come to better appreciate the unique roles and approaches of the variety of helpers in the community. Also, the findings could be used to help further the growth of the self-help movement and evaluations of it.

Though the current study did well in documenting group differences in helping behavior, it did much less well in determining the effects of such differences. There is a need for better and more varied measurement of effectiveness, perhaps especially in the personal/emotional realm. In the present study, subjective global ratings concerning a specific helping interaction were used. Thus, the study's measures represent only one limited view of "effectiveness." In future research, measures could include objective outcome indices (e.g., employment status, use of social services), measures of psychological adjustment (determined from multiple sources, including professional judgements), parent effectiveness ratings, and measures of social networks and social functioning. Furthermore, there is a need to determine how different helper behaviors and styles relate to overall effectiveness and long-term outcomes in helpees. For instance, though lawyers seem effective in providing legal/financial advice and information in the short-term, their helping approach and frequent encouragement of an adversarial stance between spouses may have very adverse effects in the long-term.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, F's, and Post-Hoc Duncan's Multiple Range Tests for 20 ANOVAs Assessing Group Differences in Helper Verbal Behaviors and Effectiveness

HCVRCS VARIABLES	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc Tests
Verbosity			10.50	.001	L > SH , MH
MH	257.48	68.14			
L	383.90	79.10			
SH	285.15	82.23			
Minimal Encouragers[a]			6.07	.006	MH > L , SH
MH	.181	.168			
L	.063	.037			
SH	.062	.044			
Approval-Reassurances			2.19	.125	
MH	.038	.038			
L	.032	.032			
SH	.060	.044			
Information			17.03	.001	L > SH > MH
MH	.290	.165			
L	.592	.122			
SH	.403	.115			
Direct Guidance			2.89	.068	
MH	.083	.050			
L	.063	.040			
SH	.102	.039			
Closed Questions			4.25	.022	L , MH > SH
MH	.187	.097			
L	.188	.113			
SH	.103	.005			
Open Questions			13.35	.001	MH > SH > L
MH	.068	.039			
L	.016	.016			
SH	.037	.034			
Restatements			4.91	.013	MH > L
MH	.076	.051			
L	.031	.017			
SH	.057	.045			

Table 1 (continued)

	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc Tests
Reflections			28.18	.001	MH > SH > L
MH	.033	.018			
L	.004	.003			
SH	.018	.011			
Interpretations			4.47	.018	MH, SH > L
MH	.014	.017			
L	.002	.002			
SH	.011	.012			
Confrontations			4.49	.018	MH, SH > L
MH	.004	.003			
L	.001	.001			
SH	.005	.005			
Self-Disclosures[b]			47.02	.001	SH > L , MH
MH	.001	.001			
L	.003	.004			
SH	.121	.009			
Silences[c]			1.63	.210	
MH	.014	.031			
L	.003	.006			
SH	.008	.011			
Other Responses			2.11	.135	
MH	.011	.011			
L	.006	.005			
SH	.016	.018			
LEGAL/FINANCIAL EFFECTIVENESS					
Helper-Rated[d]			15.86	.001	L > MH, SH
MH	5.21	.98			
L	7.79	1.12			
SH	5.00	2.04			
Helpee-Rated			10.05	.001	L > SH , MH
MH	3.79	2.33			
L	7.07	2.13			
SH	4.43	2.73			
Transcriber-Rated			17.51	.001	L > SH , MH
MH	4.43	1.79			
L	8.14	1.29			
SH	5.21	4.34			

Table 1 (continued)

	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc Tests
PERSONAL/EMOTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS					
Helper-Rated[e]			2.47	.098	
MH	7.07	.73			
L	6.21	1.63			
SH	7.07	1.00			
Helpee-Rated			5.23	.010	MH, SH > L
MH	7.29	1.14			
L	5.29	1.94			
SH	6.64	3.32			
Transcriber-Rated			.75	.478	
MH	7.14	1.46			
L	6.50	1.51			
SH	7.07	2.53			

Note. For all F-tests, df = 2, 39. For all statistical tests, the 13 HCVRCS category variables were transformed using the arcsine transformation. However, $\bar{X}$'s and SD's are presented in raw proportion form in this table to allow more meaningful interpretation. Raw $\bar{X}$'s indicate the mean proportion of responses in the helping sessions for the particular group. MH= mental health professionals, L = lawyers, and SH = self-help group leaders. Post-hoc Duncan's Multiple Range Tests were done only when $p < .05$ for the associated F-test. The ">" sign in the table indicates a significant ($p < .05$) post-hoc comparison of means and a comma indicates the lack of a significant difference between means.

[a] Cochran's C = .723, $p < .01$. Post-hoc Cochran C-tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) variance differences: MH > SH , L.

[b] Cochran's C = .960, $p < .01$. Post-hoc Cochran C-tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) variance differences: SH > L > MH.

[c] Cochran's C = .654, $p < .01$. Post-hoc Cochran C-tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) variance differences: MH > L.

[d] Cochran's C = .653, $p < .01$. Post-hoc Cochran C-tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) variance differences: SH > L , MH.

[e] Cochran's C = .634, $p < .05$. Post-hoc Cochran C-tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) variance differences: L > MH.

Table 2

Significant Results from 16 Repeated Measures ANOVAs, Including Means, Standard Deviations, F's, and Post-Hoc Duncan's Multiple Range Tests

Dependent Variable / Effect	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc Tests
Minimal Encouragers					
Phase			16.96	.001	P1 > P2 > P3
P1	.136	.143			
P2	.102	.126			
P3	.075	.098			
Information					
Phase			34.32	.001	P3 > P2 > P1
P1	.302	.181			
P2	.447	.231			
P3	.514	.225			
Group X Phase			4.63	.003	
MH: P1	.175	.138			P3 > P2 > P1
P2	.294	.211			
P3	.380	.175			
L : P1	.391	.182			P3 > P2 > P1
P2	.622	.198			
P3	.746	.165			
SH: P1	.340	.153			P2 , P3 , P1
P2	.424	.159			
P3	.415	.118			
Direct Guidance					
Phase			11.80	.001	P3 > P2 , P1
P1	.063	.060			
P2	.074	.068			
P3	.112	.066			
Open Questions					
Phase			15.36	.001	P1 > P2 > P3
P1	.057	.049			
P2	.043	.052			
P3	.025	.032			
Restatements					
Phase			4.86	.011	P1 > P3
P1	.070	.066			
P2	.056	.058			
P3	.044	.045			

Table 2 (continued)

	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc Tests
Closed Questions					
Phase			34.88	.001	P1 > P2 > P3
P1	.247	.160			
P2	.144	.136			
P3	.097	.091			
Group X Phase			7.25	.001	
MH: P1	.246	.121			P1 > P2 , P3
P2	.183	.109			
P3	.139	.085			
L : P1	.355	.190			P1 > P2 > P3
P2	.157	.185			
P3	.059	.076			
SH: P1	.142	.078			P1 > P3
P2	.093	.086			
P3	.092	.098			
Confrontations[a]					
Phase			3.37	.040	P2 > P1 , P3
P1	.004	.004			
P2	.007	.009			
P3	.004	.003			
Legal/Financial Effectiveness					
Rater			3.98	.023	HR , TR > HE
HR	6.00	1.91			
HE	5.10	2.47			
TR	5.93	2.35			

Note. Though 16 repeated measures ANOVAs were done (for 14 HCVRCS and 2 effectivenss areas), only those yielding significant ($p < .05$) results are presented. For phase effects, $df = 2, 78$. For group X phase interaction effects, $df = 4, 78$. Though all statistical tests for the 13 HCVRCS category variables are based on transformed variables, $\bar{X}$'s and SD's are presented in raw proportion form (see Table 2 note). P1 = phase one, P2 = phase two, and P3 = phase three. MH= mental health professionals, L = lawyers, and SH = self-help group leaders. HR = helpers, HE = helpees, and TR = transcribers. Post-hoc Duncan's Multiple Range Tests were done only when $p < .05$ for the associated F-test. The ">" sign in the table indicates a significant ($p < .05$) post-hoc comparison of means and a comma indicates the lack of a significant difference between means.

[a] Compound symmetry assumption of repeated measures ANOVA violated ($p < .01$, $df = 39$).